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ABSTRACT

The University of Minnesota's teacher center was established by the University's Board of Regents and the Minneapolis Public Schools Board of Education. The teacher center functions to: (a) identify common priorities of the school and university systems, and jointly design projects and programs of inservice, preservice, and curriculum development; (b) provide a resource facility for faculty, students, and community where ideas and problems are shared; and (c) experiment in organizational governance and differentiated staffing. The following assumptions elucidate the Minneapolis school system's position toward alternatives: (a) if the alternatives movement is to reflect more genuine choice, that choice should emanate from legitimate values differing from the goals and processes of schools in the community; (b) the alternative schools must possess a variety of explicit options; and (c) the community needs more explicit models of schools to choose from and modify. Parallel to these developments, the College of Education developed the following objectives: (a) to explore ways of training teachers and deciding what different teacher roles may be needed; and (b) to develop training programs conceptualized in terms of school programs and the role needs of teachers in those programs. Both the University and the school system agree that their Project OPEN, and other types of change strategies as well, are needed to provide training for pre- and inservice teachers to better acquire those skills needed to teach in open schools or in an open classroom environment. (JS)

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The Teacher Center: A Vehicle For Public School/College Collaboration In Comprehensive Renewal

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The Teacher Center: A Vehicle For
Public School/College Collaboration
In Comprehensive Renewal

In July of 1973 a Teacher Center was formally and contractually established by the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota and the Board of Education, Minneapolis Public Schools. This Center has a unique relationship to the parent institutions and in the role it plays on behalf of those agencies.

It is first of all a structure for providing training and training programs for educational personnel. The Center has the critical task of identifying common priorities of the two systems and then soliciting jointly designed or endorsed projects and programs of in-service, pre-service and curriculum development which address these needs. When possible, all three of these latter foci are interrelated in a project as will be illustrated shortly. The personnel and financial resources of the Center which are used in these developmental activities are provided by the parent institutions and the National Institute of Education. These resources serve as the catalyst for mutual involvement with the Center staff assuming a very active "brokerage" role.

In a second role, the Center provides a resource facility for faculty, staff, administrators, community and students. Through a variety of informal and formal interactions between members of these groups while in the Center, a wide range of ideas and problems are shared and proposals continually germinate.

In addition, the Center is an experiment in organizational governance and differentiated staffing. To a large degree the resources of the Center are controlled by the clientele of the Center.

At one level considerable autonomy is provided an elected committee of teachers, parents and administrations for deciding how in-service resources will be allocated to teachers, aides, administrators and community. This decision-making sub-system of the Center relates specifically to the Southeast Alternatives

Program personnel and community (funded by National Institute of Education Experimental Schools) and addresses individual and small group needs.

Resources for broader programmatic development are under the policy direction of a joint Teacher Center Board. These Board members are appointed by the Dean of the College and the Superintendent of Schools. Both systems are not only equally represented but the Southeast community has voting power as well.

Finally, there is a Policy Board comprised of two high positions in the College - Associate Deans - and two corollary positions in the school system - Deputy and Assistant Superintendents. This structure insures a continuing dialogue between power people in both systems. It allows them to identify programmatic priorities as seen from their unique perspective and to set parameters for the programmatic decision-making of the Teacher Center Board. Institutional and inter-institutional mission is continually reassessed by those administrators formally charged with that responsibility but the translation of that mission into programmatic terms is decided by those on the Teacher Center Board who represent the personnel responsible for implementing those programs.

The Center is staffed with public school teachers and administrators, University faculty and a variety of lay personnel responsible for the appropriate involvement and training of the community in various levels and aspects of the schooling process.

The intent of this paper is not to detail what the Center does or how it is staffed but rather to briefly address how and why school/university collaboration has been effected through this rather complex structure; and further, how modified versions of this Center are now being extended throughout the larger system. Rather than elaborate at this point upon the legal-political structure of the Center, its primary mission or internal staffing, the rather unique conditions calling for program development and staff training in both systems should be

noted. These conditions were critical in defining the concepts of governance and direction of mission undertaken by the Center.

The proliferation of "alternative" schools need not be documented here. It is sufficient to state that in literally hundreds of schools and school communities a variety of options have been evolving. Many perceive the alternatives "movement" as the only major reform in education today. Many also perceive it as a "grass roots" movement which, if institutionalized, will die.

The strong position taken by both the school system and the University contradicts this latter sentiment. The position taken is that while there are many exciting options which have evolved in this "movement," it has not greatly facilitated choice for the great majority of the public.

In reality much of the "grass roots" involvement has been limited to varying degrees of disenchantment with what <u>has been</u>, rather than a generation of models of what <u>should be</u>. Too often 'the alternative' is ill-defined and represents but little choice for the great majority of families in the community.

The Minneapolis Schools has taken a very strong proactive posture with respect to alternatives. The following assumptions elucidate this position.

1. If the alternatives movement is to reflect more genuine choice, that choice should eminate from legitimate value differences about the goals and processes of schools which in fact exist in a given school community.
2. Alternative schools must move from rather ill defined and often ill equipped alternative schools scattered here and there to more <u>explicit</u> arrays of program options either within a school or between schools in close geographic proximity in order to afford a reasonable choice <u>to all enrolled in public schools</u>.
3. The idea that well articulated variations in programs will eminate from some united groundswell of determined parents and community is considerably naive. The profession must better articulate what these fundamental value differences are and how these can be reflected in variant ways, in terms of the basic

conventions of school, i.e., time, space, staffing and curriculum design. The public quite frankly does not know which viable options might exist. They deserve more explicit models to choose from and to further modify.

The Minneapolis schools is formally committed by action of the school board to move to systems or arrays of alternative schools. The Southeast Alternatives prototype has, for example, four distinct elementary school models in the same high school attendance area for parents and children to select from, in terms of the latter's education. The implications of this board decision are significant. Considerable effort is needed to assess fundamental needs and interests and particularly the differences in those interests in the school community. Comprehensive program renewal for many schools is inevitable and considerable redefinition of many teacher roles will be required.

Parallel to these developments, the College of Education reaffirmed its mission to endorse the following principles:

1. A major university should be engaged in research and experimentation in teacher training and not teacher training per se. Serious exploration is needed not only in terms of the best way to train teachers but what different teacher roles may in fact, be needed.
2. Teacher training programs should be conceptualized in terms of school programs and the role needs of teachers in those programs. This is to say, that very often teaching effectiveness is context specific and the teacher competencies stressed in a training program should be role derived from teachers operating in the specific context for which one is preparing teachers. Alternative schools obviously mandate some alternative skills.
3. College based teacher educators must seriously reexamine what viable role it can play in the continuing education of teachers but also explore what more substantive role experienced teachers should play in the initial preparation of teachers.

It should be underscored that these basic assumptions and principles, both with respect to alternatives schools and with respect to teacher training, are inextricably interwoven. They have committed two systems to explore programs and staff development at a level of comprehensiveness and degrees of interrelatedness, rarely attempted. It is too soon to sort out the rhetoric from the reality. The awareness of the enormity of task is beginning to settle. It should also be noted that this large scale program renewal is being approached on a wide variety of fronts, often without the involvement of the Teacher Center or the College of Education.

On the other hand, the Minneapolis Public Schools/University of Minnesota Teacher Center is one of the fundamental keys to, and primary vehicles for, effecting this desired wide scale renewal.

An illustration of one of the programmatic efforts funded by the Teacher Center Board illustrates this interrelatedness. Project OPEN was initiated in 1973 to provide training for teachers both pre- and in-service to better acquire those skills needed to teach in open school or open classroom environments. This developmental effort which had to speak to common priorities in both systems incorporated the following components:

1. A year of intensive observation of teacher-pupil interactions in open classrooms in Minneapolis. Role analyses and needs assessment resulted in a clearer articulation of the competencies needed to teach in this type of school setting. This study was undertaken jointly by college faculty and teachers in open schools.
2. The design of a pre-service teacher training curriculum which was role derived by a core of college faculty and open classroom teachers. Concurrently, an internship program for experienced teachers and administrators who would shortly be starting open classrooms in their schools was designed. Curricular components of the pre-service model were also appropriate for the in-service

personnel.

3. The implementation of both the pre-service Project OPEN and the in-service internship program. Outstanding classroom teachers in the larger system were released by a permanent cadre of teachers who were rotated through the system so the experienced teachers could assume a ten-week internship in the Marcy OPEN School. A core of teachers in the Marcy OPEN School were in turn released by these interns to team teach, with college faculty, the undergraduates enrolled in Project OPEN. These were the same teachers who have engaged in the role analysis and the development of this teacher education curriculum. They spent two to three half days a week on campus with these student teachers and then monitored them at other times during the week as these students were integrated into their open school setting for applied practice.

What were the effects of this type of change strategy both in terms of the school system and the college?

- The school system has a number of key people with a broader understanding of the problems encountered as the transition to more open systems is made. (A number of these original interns have formed a support group with three to four other teachers and their building administrator, and are continuing to meet on a regular basis to confront program and staff development problems. This continuing developmental effort was again funded by the Teacher Center and has been built into a credited program by the college.)
- The school system has some beginning training and assessment materials in the area of open education appropriate to the needs of their personnel.
- The school system has had considerable input in assuring that both pre- and in-service training components sponsored by the college are tied to the needs and problems of evolving programs and new roles in the schools.

- The school system has access to beginning teachers with considerable experience in and orientation to open classroom teaching.
- The college has a number of instructors with a greater sensitivity to the needs of teachers in a particular type of instructional setting.
- The college has new training and curriculum materials.
- The college has a more diversified instructional format incorporating practioners into the teaching as well as the supervisory component of a pre-service program.
- The college has responded in an appropriate and most functional way to the question of governance in teacher education by involving teachers in assessment, curriculum development and instructional decision-making.

Parity is a critical concept in a jointly funded and administered center. But parity must extend beyond equal representation in policy making. It must be reflected in mutual benefits, probably not otherwise achieved for both systems, in terms of their programs and staffs. Organizations which achieve this type of trade off respond to the real essence of parity.

College/school partnerships, where the primary focus is the traditional concern of what role the college can assume in assisting with the continuing education needs of experienced teachers, are unfortunately limiting. In the crassest sense this becomes a trade off of bodies for credit hours. Parity is little more than economics in this type of relationship. When college personnel are willing to get their "hands dirty" in clarifying with both community and teachers what options are needed and desired within their school programs, they are beginning with the cornerstone of teacher training. Until and unless this happens, colleges cannot expect school personnel to contribute more to beginning teacher education than monitoring student teachers. The joint programmatic effort described here illustrates the multiple trade offs generated when the training of educational personnel is approached in the context of comprehensive program renewal. The

degree to which the basic principles outlined earlier in this paper are endorsed, will determine the type and degree of collaboration between systems.

This model of a Teacher Center is rather unique (by the very nature of its focus on comprehensive renewal in a time of retrenchment and austerity). It addresses the matter of bold programmatic efforts to which a major school district and a major university should be committed. It is the type of Center model which probably cannot and should not be replicated again in the larger school system. It rather can serve as a hub for satellite Centers which in a more genuine sense are Teacher Centers. These Centers should have policy boards comprised primarily of classroom teachers. They will allow both individual and groups of teachers to better access the multiple personnel and material resources intended as support for the professional at the operating level. A better coordination and continuing reallocation of resources should be facilitated by such Centers. Such monies can be accessed by teachers through a panel of peers rather than having to channel such requests upward through traditional line structures of school administration. This structure still must be accountable to the system at the top of the bureaucratic pyramid and thus it is not outside of the established structure. It rather places much of the power of decision-making, with respect to professional development, at the base of this line structure.

Certainly such Centers can influence the direction of the system and schools within the system and do this without negating the order of decision-making necessary within the hierarchical structure. Crucial to the success of such Centers will be the degree of consonance between individual and programmatic development. Considerable vision and courage by those at the top of the decision-making structure is needed. The ability of the "partnership center" to identify and maintain program renewal efforts, which are not only needed and desired but understandable and feasible, will also determine whether there is continuity and cohesiveness to

the staff development efforts negotiated in the satellite centers.

The time has come when the power, imagination and influence of the teacher will be tested. It is essential that this energy be channeled within the boundaries of more explicit mission statements and articulate conceptualizations of the schooling process. The challenge to the teacher is no greater than the challenge to those others in the educational enterprise responsible for defining the direction of our formal educational process. Enough arrows have been fired into the night.